

ment to a situation of which he could not even have dreamed, and which left him breathless. But for Spearman, obviously, it was not that. Following his noncommittal nod of acknowledgment of Sherrill's introduction and his first steady scrutiny of Alan, the big, handsome man swung himself off from the desk on which he sat and leaned against it, facing them more directly.

"Oh, yes—Conrad," he said. His tone was hearty; in it Alan could recognize only so much of reserve as might be expected from Sherrill's partner who had taken an attitude of opposition. The shipmasters, looking on, could see, no doubt, not even that; except for the excitement which Alan himself could not conceal, it must appear to them only an ordinary introduction.

Alan fought sharply down the swift rush of his blood and the tightening of his muscles.

"I can say truly that I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Spearman," he managed.

THERE was no recognition of anything beyond the mere surface meaning of the words in Spearman's slow smile of acknowledgment, as he turned from Alan to Sherrill.

"I'm afraid you've taken rather a bad time, Lawrence."

"You're busy, you mean. This can wait, Henry, if what you're doing is immediate."

"I want some of these men to be back in Michigan to-night. Can't we get together later—this afternoon? You'll be about here this afternoon?" His manner was not casual; Alan could not think of any expression of that man as being casual; but this, he thought, came as near it as Spearman could come.

"I think I can be here this afternoon," Alan said.

"Would two-thirty suit you?"

"As well as any other time."

"Let's say two-thirty, then." Spearman turned and noted the hour almost solicitously among the scrawled appointments on his desk pad; straightening, after this act of dismissal, he walked with them to the door, his hand on Sherrill's shoulder.

"Circumstances have put us—Mr. Sherrill and myself—in a very difficult position, Conrad," he remarked. "We want much to be fair to all concerned—"

He did not finish the sentence, but halted at the door. Sherrill went out, and Alan followed him; exasperation—half outrage yet half admiration—at Spearman's bearing, held Alan speechless. The blood rushed hotly to his skin as the door closed behind them, his hands clenched, and he turned back to the closed door; then he checked himself and followed Sherrill, who, oblivious to Alan's excitement, led the way to the door which bore Corvet's name. He opened it, disclosing an empty room, somewhat larger than Spearman's and similar to it, except that it lacked the marks of constant use. It was plain that, since Spearman had chosen to put off discussion of Alan's status, Sherrill did not know what next to do; he stood an instant in thought, then, contenting himself with inviting Alan to lunch, he excused himself to return to his office. When he had gone, closing the door behind him, Alan

began to pace swiftly up and down the room.

What had just passed had left him still breathless; he felt bewildered. If every movement of Spearman's great, handsome body had not recalled to him their struggle of the night before—if, as Spearman's hand rested cordially on Sherrill's shoulder, Alan had not seemed to feel again that big hand at his throat—he would almost have been ready to believe that this was not the man whom he had fought. But he could not doubt that; he had recognized Spearman beyond question. And Spearman had recognized him—he was sure of that; he could not for an instant doubt it; Spearman had known it was Alan whom he had fought in Corvet's house even before Sherrill had brought them together. Was there not further proof of that in Spearman's subsequent manner toward him? For what was all this cordiality except defiance? Undoubtedly Spearman had acted just as he had to show how undisturbed he was, how indifferent he might be to any accusation Alan could make. Not having told Sherrill of the encounter in the house—not having told any one else—Alan could not tell it now, after Sherrill had informed him that Spearman opposed his accession to Corvet's estate; or, at least, he could not tell who the man was. In the face of Spearman's manner toward him to-day, Sherrill would not believe. If Spearman denied it—and his story of his return to town that morning made it perfectly certain that he would deny it—it would be only Alan's word against Spearman's—the word of a stranger unknown to Sherrill except by Alan's own account of himself and the inferences from Corvet's acts. There could be no risk to Spearman in that; he had nothing to fear if Alan blurted an accusation against him. Spearman, perhaps, even wanted him to do that—hoped he would do it. Nothing could more discredit Alan than such an unsustainable accusation against the partner who was opposing Alan's taking his father's place. For it had been plain that Spearman dominated Sherrill, and that Sherrill felt confidence in and admiration toward him.

ALAN grew hot with the realization that, in the interview, Spearman had also dominated him. He had been unable to find anything adequate to do, anything adequate to answer, in opposition to this man more than fifteen years older than himself and having a lifelong experience in dealing with all kinds of men. He would not yield to Spearman like that again; it was the bewilderment of his recognition of Spearman that had made him do it. Alan stopped his pacing and flung himself down in the leather desk-chair which had been Corvet's. He could hear, at intervals, Spearman's heavy, genial voice addressing the ship men in his office; its tones—half of comradeship, half of command—told only too plainly his dominance over those men also. He heard Spearman's office door open and some of the men go out; after a time it opened again, and the rest went out. He heard Spearman's voice in the outer office, then heard it again as Spearman returned alone into his private office.

There was a telephone upon Corvet's desk which undoubtedly

